

PROCEEDINGS
OF THE
SCIENTIFIC MEETINGS
OF THE
ZOOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF LONDON.

January 14, 1879.

Prof. Newton, M.A., F.R.S., V.P., in the Chair.

The Chairman opened the proceedings of the meeting with the following remarks :—

“ Before we proceed to this evening’s business, I think all present will deem it only fitting that your Chairman should say a few words in regard to the loss we have suffered by the death of our President since we last met. I am sure there was no Fellow of the Society who took a livelier or deeper interest in its welfare than did the late Lord Tweeddale ; and if proof of this assertion seem to any one wanting, I have but to refer to the facts that he was not merely content with giving us the countenance of his high social position, not merely content with presiding at our Council Meetings and discharging the formal duties of the office he bore amongst us, but that he actively participated in our scientific work, as witness the valuable and carefully elaborated papers with which he from time to time enriched our publications, the last of which you will hear read tonight. I believe I am right in saying that since these Scientific Meetings were established, we have never had a President who was so well, so intimately, known to the majority of the Fellows who attend them, or one who was so competent to appreciate the papers read or the communications made at them ; and this, I need not point out to you, has been of great benefit to us. Of Lord Tweeddale’s life and labours I shall say

nothing. I hope they may be duly recounted by some one far more fitted than myself to do them justice; but for my own part I wish to express an opinion, in which all present I think will join, that the active sympathy which our late President invariably exhibited, not only for those who busied themselves in that branch of study especially affected by himself, but for all working zoologists, requires acknowledgment on the present occasion; and in these imperfect sentences I have endeavoured to give it utterance."

The Secretary read the following report on the additions to the Society's Menagerie during the month of December 1878.

The total number of registered additions to the Society's Menagerie during the month of December was 80, of which 42 were by presentation, 33 by purchase, and 5 were received on deposit. The total number of departures during the same period, by death and removals, was 111.

The most noticeable additions during the month of December were as follows:—

1. A dark-coloured Lemur new to the Society's collection, which appears to be the Mayotte Lemur (*Lemur mayottensis*, Schl.).

2. A collection of Lemurs brought to England by Mr. George A. Shaw, who has been resident some years at Fianàrautsòà, in the province of Betsileo, in Central Madagascar, and acquired by the Society partly by purchase and partly by presentation. Amongst these are representatives of two species new to the Society's collection—one being a *Chirogaleus*, and the other *Microcebus smithi*—besides an example of the little-known *Hapalemur simus*. Mr. Shaw has favoured me with some interesting notes upon these little-known animals, which will be read at a future meeting, when I hope to be able to give the exact name of the *Chirogaleus*, if determinable with our existing knowledge.

3. A female Punjaub Wild Sheep (*Ovis cycloceros*), presented by Col. W. R. Alexander, having been obtained in the hills between Upper Sind and Beloochistan.

Dr. Traquair exhibited a specimen of *Alectorænas nitidissima*, an extinct Pigeon of Mauritius, belonging to the Museum of Science and Art of Edinburgh.

Prof. Newton made the following remarks upon this specimen:—

"Dr. Traquair deserves the best thanks of those present for having been at the trouble of bringing to London and exhibiting here the specimen of *Alectorænas nitidissima* now on the table. It had been believed that but two skins of this species existed—one in the Museum at Paris, the other in that of Port Louis, the capital of Mauritius. It was therefore with extreme pleasure that, on the 26th of September last, when Dr. Traquair was kindly showing me over the Museum of Science and Art in Edinburgh, I recognized in one of the cases the third example, now before you.

"The true history of this beautiful and ill-fated species may be told in a very few words. It would take a long time to recount and re-

fute the numerous fictions that have been heaped upon the only available facts. The bird was sufficiently well described and figured by Sonnerat in his ' Voyage aux Indes orientales ' (ii. p. 175, pl. 101) as coming from the Île de France, and was named by him the *Pigeon hollandais*—a name given, I suspect, not so much from the former inhabitants of the island, as from its plumage exhibiting the colours of the Dutch flag (red, blue, and white). Two examples obtained by him found their way to the Museum of Paris, where Temminck (Hist. Fig. cd. 2, i. p. 50, pl. 19) seems to have seen them at the beginning of the present century, their plumage very much the worse, he says, for the fumes (of sulphuric acid, as M. Alphonse Milne-Edwards informs me) to which they had been exposed. In 1790, Bonnaterre, describing the species afresh, but apparently from the same specimens, said of it (Encycl. Méth. p. 233), and probably with truth:—'On le trouve fréquemment à l'île de France.' In or about 1816 the University of Edinburgh became possessed of what has long been known as the 'Dufresne Collection,' from the French naturalist of that name, who was originally (as I learn from M. A. Milne-Edwards) a dealer in Natural-History specimens, and had also been for some time Conservator of the Cabinet of Natural History belonging to the Empress Joséphine, but in 1815 or the following year entered the Museum of Paris as Aide-Naturaliste. In which capacity it was that he parted with the collection obtained by the University of Edinburgh I cannot say; but that collection contained the specimen of this Pigeon, now before you, as the label affixed to it shows¹; and it remained the property of the University until a few years ago, when it was transferred to the newly established Museum of Science and Art at Edinburgh. This brings me to the end of my facts.

"It is a very unpleasing task to expose the blunders of other naturalists; but I am sorry to say that few authors subsequent to Sonnerat and Bonnaterre have referred to this species without making some mistake about it. In one very conspicuous case this mistake can scarcely have been otherwise than intentional. The misstatements of Le Vaillant are notorious; but I do not know a more unblushing instance of his mendacity than his circumstantial account of the *Ramier herissé*, as he called this species (Ois. d'Afr. vi. p. 74). It naturally misled all succeeding authors, until his assertions respecting this bird were concisely summed up by Sundevall (Krit. Framställn. p. 53) in the sentence 'quæ omnia inter fabulas numeranda sunt.' But Sundevall did not seem to have suspected that the species was extinct; nor perhaps had any one else, until Mr. Edward Newton, during his residence in Mauritius between 1859 and 1878, became convinced that such was the case. He indeed once hoped (*Ibis*, 1861, p. 277) that he had heard of it; but further inquiry proved the bird meant by his informant to be *Trocaza meyeri*; and the only trace of

¹ "The inscription, as I copied it at the time, ran:—'The Hackled Pigeon. *Ptilinopus nitidissimus*, Scop. sp. Locality Isle of France. *Columba Francia* Dufresne.' On the bottom of the stand was written, 'R-d Hackled Pigeon, 219. *Columba Francia* Linn.'"

its former existence in the island that he met with was the stuffed skin which, as I have already said, is in the Museum there.

"Coming to later authors, Mr. G. R. Gray, who, in 1840, had proposed (List Gen. B. p. 58) the generic separation of this pigeon from others of the family under the name of *Alectrænas* (which, as Agassiz subsequently pointed out, should be written *Alectorænas*), in 1855 marked it as represented in the British Museum (Cat. Gen. B. p. 97); and so it appeared in his 'Hand-list' (ii. p. 228); but I have not been able to find that the British Museum ever possessed a specimen, and no mention is made of it in his 'List of Specimens' of *Columbæ* of 1856. In 1868 MM. Pollen and Van Dam entered this species (Rech. Faune de Madag. p. 159) as belonging to Madagascar alone, without even giving it a place in the Mauritian list; and in 1877 Dr. Hartlaub, in his most recent work (Vög. Madag. u. s. w. p. 264), though his other statements are right enough, was misled into the error of saying that 'Fossile Reste dieser Art sammelte Herr Henry H. Slater.'

"Allied to *Alectorænas nitidissima* are three species which still survive and are natives of Madagascar, the Comoros, and the Seychelles. All have been treated by Dr. Hartlaub as congeneric; and they will probably stand as *A. madagascariensis* (Linn.), *A. sgauzini* (Verr.), and *A. pulcherrima* (Scop.). It is possible that Rodriguez once possessed another member of the group, the *Columba rodericana* of M. A. Milne-Edwards; but we have not received sufficient remains of that species (which is certainly extinct) to decide the point, and the older voyagers give us no help here as they do in so many other cases. I shall not trouble you with commenting on the nomenclature of any of these species. That which is the subject of my remarks has had a sufficient number of useless synonyms applied to it; but on the whole they have all been fortunate, and there is no difficulty in determining the names they should bear, though both the generic and specific appellation of *Alectorænas nitidissima* were conferred by writers who had never set eyes on a specimen.

"To conclude, I may state (1) that there is no trustworthy evidence of *Alectorænas nitidissima* having inhabited any other locality than Mauritius, to which it was therefore in all probability peculiar, (2) that it is now wholly extinct, and (3) that remains of only three specimens are known to have been preserved."

The following extract was read from a letter addressed by Commodore Hoskins, of H.M.S. 'Wolverine,' dated Sydney, Oct. 9, 1878, to Capt. Evans, C.B., Hydrographer to the Admiralty:—

"It is some time since you asked me to obtain for Mr. Selater of the Zoological Society information as to the northern limit of the 'Mooruk,' and whether it is found in New Ireland.

"I instructed Lieut. Horne, commanding the 'Sandfly,' to do all in his power to solve the point; and I have just heard from him at Brisbane (which he reached on his way down from the islands) that, having taken Mr. Brown, the Wesleyan Missionary, and some native interpreters on board in Blanche Bay, he proceeded to visit the

whole of the south coast of New Ireland, communicating constantly with the natives and anchoring in many of the bays, and that nowhere could he find any traces of the bird or learn that it exists. On the contrary, the natives seemed quite ignorant of all that concerns it, and offered to buy some eggs, which had been brought from New Britain in order to facilitate inquiries on the subject.

“P.S. Mr. Brown says the native name in New Britain is *Moorup* not *Mooruk*.”

The following extract was read from a letter addressed to the Secretary by the Rev. G. Brown, C.M.Z.S., dated Port Hunter, Duke-of-York group, Sept. 7, 1878:—

“About three weeks ago H.M.S. ‘Sandfly,’ Capt. A. G. Horne, arrived here on her way to the extreme end of New Ireland. Capt. Horne told me that he had instructions from the Commodore to inquire as to whether the ‘Moorup’¹ was found on New Ireland or not. He asked me about it; and I told him that, so far as we knew, it was not found on any part of the west coast, but that we knew little or nothing of the east side of the island. Capt. Horne very kindly asked me to accompany them on their cruise; and as I was not at all well, and as I also wished very much to examine the coast further north, I very gladly accepted his offer. We were away about twelve days from here, and went as far as the north end of Sandwich Island, but did not reach New Hanover; nor did we visit the east coast of New Ireland at all. We anchored at Wood Harbour, on the mainland opposite Sandwich Island. We saw no traces of the Moorup—neither eggs, feathers, nor bones, all of which are used by the natives of New Britain—the feathers for head-dresses, and the bones for the ends of their spears. Of these we saw no signs, however, in New Ireland. We had a Moorup’s egg with us, and showed it everywhere; but no one seemed to recognize it. I think we may be very certain that neither the Moorup nor the Cockatoo are found on New Ireland. There is much more open country on the east side of the island; but all the natives assure us that they are not found there either.”

The Secretary read the following extract from a letter addressed to him by Mr. R. Trimen, F.Z.S., dated South-African Museum, Cape Town, 25th Sept. 1878:—

“With respect to your *Plectropterus niger*², I have ascertained that all the four specimens were brought down from Zanzibar by Capt. Garrett, of the mail-steamer ‘Kafir.’ Two were given to General Sir A. Cunynghame, who afterwards sent them to the Society, and the other two to Mr. W. G. Brounger. One of the latter two, while on Mr. Brounger’s farm at Constantia, was shot; and the survivor subsequently disappeared, Mr. Brounger believing that it flew away.

The following papers were read:—

¹ [*Casuarinus bennetti*, see above.—P. L. S.]

² See figure and description, P. Z. S. 1877, p. 47, pl. vii.